

New Administrative Officer at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

by Becky Uta



Bird's eye view from the office of Becky Uta, the new Administrative Officer at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (credit: Becky Uta/KNWR).

Where did I come from? How did I get here? Why is it interesting to others? Being tasked with introducing myself, I realize it can be cumbersome. As I write and start over a few times, I laugh, as I look outside my window today, of all days, and I see three moose chomping on a tree, followed by conversations from the visitor center about delayed skiing because of them. I ponder this scene and know this is the reason I am here. Alaska is that place on everyone's bucket list to experience and those who have expressed with gusto their intent to come back.

I am Becky Uta, Administrative Officer for the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. I track the Refuge budget and contracts, and supervise two employees who handle all things clerical: issue permits, triage incoming calls, and process Refuge employee personnel actions—the administration of administration. I started my career with the U.S. Army, later transferring to the Federal Aviation Administration, both out of Kansas City, Missouri, and earned many “admin” hats over my 10 years of service: Secretary, Records Manager, FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) Specialist, to name a few. As an enlisted Soldier, now Veteran, I was trained to be an Aircraft Structural Repairer.

Nothing in my past really gave me the direct heading to how I came to the Refuge, like some of my co-workers in technical fields. I have a knack for details and multitasking, and I love to fine tune processes for

time efficiencies. My life is my blended family, with a husband of 13+ years and four children, ranging from 10 to 19 years.

Word spread like wild fire at my former office concerning my move to Alaska, the number one comment received, “Wow that is quite a move, Why Alaska?” My response was always “Why NOT Alaska!” I am writing whilst the moose happily munch on the foliage outside my window. In the current winter state, covered in a foot of snow and sub-zero temperatures, I still proclaim, why not Alaska! It is that elusive place I only saw in pictures and heard about in the adventures of Alex, my brother, who has lived in Wasilla for more than a decade.

As my family prepared to leave the city I called home for 22 years, we were subjected to lots of advice and opinions about this hidden wonderland. Oh, we heard it all: Every advice about bears and moose, people shared songs about Alaska, and we heard every story about past trips to the state.

A personal experience was with my brother when I visited for the interview. He said that my “Lower 48” money wouldn't work here, indicating that I need not pay for dinner. But when I tried my bank card, it really didn't work! Unbeknownst to me, the card was only blocked as a security feature because it was outside of the U.S. Yes, read “Outside the U.S.”! He responded, “See Little Sis' Your Lower 48 money doesn't work here.”

Of course I began “collecting” these comments and tales. A few of my favorites: Do I like Snow? Am I ready for the cold? Am I prepared for the month of darkness? Do I have enough blankets? We need to brush up on dog sledding. The best joke was: If a bear charges, you only have to run faster than the person in front of you. Of course, I've since learned that is NOT what you should do if a bear charges! Check out our tips for outdoor safety: http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Kenai/visit/visitor_activities/safety.html.

Drawing in on final thoughts, since my arrival at the Refuge, I learned right away that this is a place full of life, community, and passion for nature. As a newly

transplanted resident of “The Last Frontier,” I am very fortunate to be a part of a place that my children and future generations will be able to enjoy. I have only seen the “tip of the iceberg” so far and, sorry, no penguins (another amusing comment received).

Living in the area for only three months, I sit at my office window and watch the passing moose, the occasional chickadees flit by, and experience the beautiful sunrises. Simply beautiful! So why Alaska? This is

why: Snow covered mountains that turn pink at sunset, the smell of crisp, cold, CLEAN air, and a skyline with colors that illuminate strange new places begging for me to explore, in time. But for now, it’s back to the budget system.

Rebecca Uta is the new Administrative Officer at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. You can find more information about the refuge at <http://kenai.fws.gov> or <http://www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge>.